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SUBJECT: NEW HAJJ TERMINAL IN JEDDAH SMOOTHING ARRIVAL OF  
PILGRIMS

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¶1. Summary. The Hajj Terminal at King Abdulaziz International Airport has joined the ranks of world-class passenger terminals with the completion of the second phase of a multi-year renovation and expansion project. 2800 pilgrims now arrive at the streamlined modern terminal every hour in a 24/7 operation at the arrivals-only hall. While the pilgrims are in Mecca the same building will be transformed into a departures-only facility using mobile check-in desks and repurposing every assembly area and lounge. ConsOff met two groups of American Hajj pilgrims on November 23 at the remaining old section of the Hajj Terminal. By this time next year, the old section will be replaced by the final phase of the new facility. End Summary.

¶2. On November 29, Pol/EconOff toured the new Hajj Terminal with Vice President of Civil Aviation Dr. Mohammed Berenji, Hajj Terminal Manager Sami Badr, and Ports Project Management COO Fadhel Jokhdar. The tour began alongside the old terminal. With seven arrival bays and three jetways, the terminal has been operating since the early 1980s. Each of the seven bays holds a separate operation from start to finish of passenger processing. The Hajj Terminal is the only airport in the world that functions as an all-arrivals or all-departures terminal with arrivals taking place for over four weeks leading up to the Hajj and departures starting at the conclusion of Hajj and running for over a month.

Modern Efficiency Meets Ancient Ritual  
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¶3. Abutting the old terminal now stands 60 percent of the new terminal with six of an eventual ten tubular glass jetways leading to lounges which open into a single integrated terminal hall. The first twenty-five percent of the new terminal opened last year. An enormous cavernous hall, the new structure is lined with stone and covered by a soaring enclosed ceiling of steel and glass. Pilgrims move through color-coded sectors starting with verification of health certificates and continuing to immigration, baggage claim and customs. Photographs and fingerprints are taken at immigration and a bar-code system is used to keep track of each pilgrim and make sure all pilgrims reach the correct agent, transport to Mecca and accommodation. Exiting the building after approximately two hours of arrival processing, pilgrims continue through the famous white "tented" plaza where there are rest areas for some of the national groups, cafeterias, and a new 123-room hotel under construction. At the edge of the plaza, buses stand by to transport the pilgrims to Mecca or Medinah.

¶4. Once the last Hajjis are processed on the eve of the Hajj, airport authorities will remove mobile customs operations and place 58 mobile check-in desks in front of the luggage

carousels. The carousels, which carried luggage off the planes upon arrival, will now take bags in the opposite direction to be loaded on departing planes. Arrival lounges are converted to departure lounges. Duty free shops and restaurants, still in the final phases of construction, will be open to serve outbound passengers.

¶5. A high-tech control room monitors every stage of the process remotely. However, until next year, when the old terminal will be replaced with the final phase of the new terminal, the all-Saudi staff -- a point of pride for the airport directors -- will continue to use a magnetic board with a schematic of the terminal and manually movable magnets identifying each plane-load of passengers. Surprisingly, centralized computerized check-in is just now being introduced, replacing the system of laptops owned by each carrier used to process passengers. Next year the Saudis hope to introduce through their embassies worldwide a smart card for each pilgrim which will contain his or her photograph, fingerprints, medical information, itinerary and emergency information. In a setting where dozens of languages are spoken, the introduction of these electronic processing tools will not only speed up the operation but should also aid in tracking Hajj visa overstayers, a perennial problem in the Jeddah region.

#### So Many Flights, So Little Time

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¶6. Today the Hajj Terminal handles up to 62,000 passengers inbound per day. The completed project was designed to move 3800 people per hour inbound and 3500 outbound. Currently 1000 bags per hour also move through the airport. In terms of flights, during the peak period in the few days just prior to Hajj, planes arrive and depart at the rate of one every

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minute and 20 seconds. (Note that the same three runways are used for regular and Hajj traffic.) In total, approximately 9000 flights will arrive and depart as part of the Hajj operation this year, roughly 2500 of them operated by Saudi airlines. 75-80 percent of the flights will be operated by charter companies. Under the administration of the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) the three Saudi carriers -- Saudia, SAMA and NAS Air -- collectively have the right to carry 50 percent of the passengers traveling from each Hajj country. However, lacking sufficient fleet capacity, these carriers subcontract some of that load to third-party operators. The other 50 percent of the passengers fly on their national carriers, on other regularly scheduled flights, or on special Hajj charters.

¶7. According to Dr. Berenji, there are problems every year with countries that exceed their Hajj quota, carry more than their share of the passengers on their own carriers, fail to obtain commitments to transport all of their Hajjis or otherwise need intervention and assistance with Hajj flights.

GACA endeavors to impose fines when rules are violated but supplicants will sometimes entreat the King to intercede in his capacity as guardian of the two holy mosques and quash the fines. GACA also works with operators and national authorities to find solutions for stranded pilgrims as is currently the case in Thailand where the airports have been closed due to political turmoil.

#### American Pilgrims

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¶8. On November 23, ConsOff, accompanied by Senior Consular Assistant, welcomed two separate groups of American citizen pilgrims who had arrived on planes at the old section of the Hajj terminal. The U.S. pilgrims represent a wide range of states -- from Florida to New York to Michigan to California and seemingly everywhere in between. The majority were first-time pilgrims although some were returning with family members for a second or even third pilgrimage. The Consul

presented each pilgrim with a handout listing emergency contacts in Jeddah and Mecca, including information on the services the Consulate could and could not provide as well as a few tips on Saudi customs. The pilgrims were pleased by the attention and appreciative of the visit. As time and availability allows, ConsOff plans to meet other planeloads of pilgrims whose passengers are American citizens. Approximately 15,000 U.S. residents are expected to make the Hajj pilgrimage this year. (Note: The U.S. Hajj quota this year is 20,000.)

#### What Comes Next

19. By the start of Hajj next year the old terminal hall and jetways will be torn down and replaced by an extension of the new structure which will include one jetway capable of handling Airbus A-380s. The Bin Laden Group, which built the first phase of the new terminal, has the contract for the extension -- a full 40% of the total terminal area. According to a representative of the company, work will proceed 24 hours a day to meet the tight deadline. Given anticipated population growth, the new terminal is only expected to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims for approximately 15 years. A second terminal, the same size and design as the new terminal under its own duplicate soaring white tent, is already included in the rendering of the completed airport. Construction is not planned however, for years to come. In the meantime, the Saudis will commence the construction of a rail line directly from the new terminal to Mecca and Medinah, easing the ground movement of pilgrims.

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